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UNITED NATIONS POPULATION FUND
PROPOSED PROJECTS AND PROGRAMMES

Recommendation by the Executive Director
Assistance to the Government of Cuba

Proposed UNFPA assistance: $4.5 million from regular resources

Programme period: 5 years (1997-2001)

Cycle of assistance: Fifth

Category per decision 96/15: C

Proposed assistance by core programme areas (in millions of $):

	Regular resources	*Total*
Reproductive health	4.5	4.5
Total	4.5	4.5

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CUBA

INDICATORS RELATED TO ICPD GOALS*

		Thresholds*
Births attended by health professional (%)[1]	90.0	≥60
Contraceptive prevalence rate (15-44) (%)[2]	70.0	≥55
Access to basic health services (%)[3]	98.0	≥60
Infant mortality rate (/1000)[4]	12.0	≤50
Maternal mortality rate (/100,000)[5]	39.0	≤100
Gross female enrolment rate at primary level (%)[6]	100.0	≥75
Adult female literacy rate(%)[7]	94.2	≥50

* AS CONTAINED IN DOCUMENT DP/FPA/1996/15 AND APPROVED BY THE EXECUTIVE BOARD IN DECISION 96/15.

[1] *WHO, Coverage of Maternal Care, 3rd ed., 1993. Data cover the period 1983-1993.*

[2] *United Nations Population Division, World Contraceptive Use 1994, ST/ESA/SER.A/143. Data cover the period 1986-1993.*

[3] *UNICEF, The State of the World's Children, 1995. Data cover the period 1985-1993.*

[4] *United Nations Population Division, World Population Prospects Database 1950-2050, 1994 Revision. Data are for 1992.*

[5] *UNICEF, The State of the World's Children 1995, which is based on data compiled by WHO. Data cover the period 1980-1992.*

[6] *United Nations Statistical Division, Women's Indicators and Statistics Database, Version 3 (CD-ROM), 1994, which is based on data compiled by UNESCO.*

[7] *UNESCO, Education for All - Status and Trends, 1994.*

Demographic Facts

Population (000) in 1995	11,041	Annual population growth rate (%)	0.6
Population in year 2000 (000)	11,385	Urban	1.2
Sex ratio (/100 females)	100.7	Rural	-1.3
Per cent urban	76.0	Crude birth rate (/1000)	14.9
Age distribution (%)		Crude death rate (/1000)	7.0
Ages 0-14	22.8	Net migration rate (/1000)	-1.8
Youth (15-24)	16.8	Total fertility rate (woman)	1.82
Ages 60+	12.3	Life expectancy at birth (years)	
Percentage of women aged 15-49	55.2	Males	74.2
Median age (years)	30.1	Females	78.0
Population density (/sq. km.)	100	Both sexes	76.0
		GNP per capita (U.S. dollars, 1994)	1,878

Sources: Data are from the Population Division, Department of Economic and Social Information and Policy Analysis (DESIPA) of the United Nations, World Population Prospects: the 1994 Revision; Annual population growth, including urban and rural data are from DESIPA, World Urbanization Prospects: the 1994 Revision. GNP per capita is from UNDP. Two dashes (--) indicate that data are not available.

1. The United Nations Population Fund proposes to support the Government of Cuba in its efforts to implement its reproductive health policies and strategies over the period 1997-2001. UNFPA proposes to provide assistance in the amount of $4.5 million from the Fund's regular resources to the extent such resources are available, consistent with Executive Board decision 96/15 on the allocation of UNFPA resources. This will be UNFPA's fifth cycle of assistance for Cuba.

2. The proposed activities were developed in full cooperation with the Government of Cuba through the Ministry for Foreign Investment and Economic Collaboration and other ministries concerned with population issues in the country. The proposal is based on official national plans and programmes, including the Maternal and Child Health Programme, the Family Planning Programme and the National Sexual Education Programme, as well as on the results of the mid-term review of UNFPA's previous programme of assistance that was carried out in May 1995. The proposal was structured in a logical framework through a methodology of participatory planning oriented to specific objectives.

3. Cuba is classified as a category "C" country in terms of the allocation of UNFPA resources. The overall objective of the proposed assistance is to facilitate Cuba's transition to a comprehensive reproductive health approach and to maintain the standards in that area that it has already attained. Special attention will be given to improving the quality of care, including the provision of contraceptives, and to motivating changes in behaviour, including through sex education and public information campaigns, in order to reduce the country's high level of abortions. The programme will focus on gender concerns in reproductive health and on the reproductive health needs of adolescents and youth. As a result of an analysis of their social and demographic situations, the proposed assistance will concentrate on 5 of the 14 Cuban provinces: Guantánamo, Granma, Holguín, Las Tunas and Santiago de Cuba.

4. All activities under the proposed assistance, as in all UNFPA-assisted activities, will be undertaken in accordance with the principles and objectives of the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD), which was endorsed by the General Assembly through its resolution 49/128.

Background

5. Since 1990, Cuba has been facing serious economic difficulties due to the disruption of trade relations with its former trading partners. From 1989 to 1995, the per capita gross domestic product (GDP) in pesos fell by 35.5 per cent, and national consumption was significantly reduced. Despite a slight recent recovery, economic indicators are still lower than they were 15 years ago. In the health sector, the lack of financial resources has led to a shortage of medicines, both imported and those produced domestically, and severe shortages of equipment, spare parts and materials. All of these difficulties have had a serious adverse effect on the ability of most health establishments to carry out

their functions. Almost all health installations are deteriorating. Epidemiological problems, such as sexually transmitted diseases (STDs), including HIV/AIDS, have worsened. If the impact of the economic situation is not reversed, it will be difficult to maintain the health and demographic indicators at the level that Cuba has achieved as a result of long-standing policies and investments.

6. Cuba is now at an advanced stage of its demographic transition. The notable fall in fertility, along with an important reduction of mortality over the past two decades, has transformed the age structure of the population. From a total fertility rate of 4.7 children per woman in the period 1960-1965, Cuba has become the country with the lowest fertility in the Latin American and Caribbean region. According to national statistics, at the end of 1995 the total fertility rate was of 1.49 children per woman, and the gross reproduction rate was 0.72 girls per woman. Fertility rates in the 15-19 and 20-24 age groups remain high, however. One fifth of births in Cuba are to women less than 20 years of age.

7. Intra-uterine devices (IUDs) are the most favoured method of contraception, followed by oral contraceptives and sterilization. There is little use of condoms, and the active involvement of men in contraception is still minimal. Studies have shown that the country has a very high abortion rate. From 1968 to 1992, it is estimated that 2.9 million abortions were performed in Cuba while 4.7 million children were born. That means that for every 100 live births 62 abortions were performed. The highest abortion rates are registered in the 15-19 age group and among less educated women. The shortage of contraceptives hampers reduction of these rates.

Previous UNFPA assistance

8. The assistance provided by UNFPA to the Government of Cuba through previous country programmes was mainly earmarked for family planning services, information, education and communication (IEC) activities and the improvement of population statistics. Between 1975 and 1989, UNFPA's contribution reached $10.9 million, while the assistance during the 1990-1996 period was $6.9 million.

9. Assistance during the previous country programmes included the supply of contraceptives. In order to reduce external dependency on imports and to ensure availability of contraceptives in the country, support was given for the construction of an oral contraceptive factory in Havana. The plant's systems will be tested in early 1997, and production is expected to start in the middle of the year. In the meantime, it is necessary to continue the supply of oral as well as a variety of other contraceptives as a principal component of support for reproductive health in the country, considering the high abortion rate and the increase of STDs and AIDS, which require priority attention.

10. To date, sex education has not been included in the formal education curricula in Cuba nor have the resources of mass media been utilized effectively as a way of making the Cuban people

aware of reproductive health issues. The proposed assistance will enhance sex education within the formal education system as a complementary strategy for the prevention of STDs and undesired pregnancies. The latest mid-term review of the UNFPA programme pointed out that it was also necessary to strengthen technical support in the area of reproductive health IEC, especially for the promotion of gender issues and, particularly, of men's responsibility in contraception. These topics will be included in a programme of training for health providers. Since the past programmes have shown the need for community mobilization, forthcoming assistance will seek to enhance the participation of such institutions as the National Women's Federation, academic centres and the Revolution Defence Committees in reproductive health activities.

Other external assistance

11. Actions in the field of reproductive health will be coordinated with other United Nations agencies, mainly UNAIDS, UNICEF and the Pan-American Health Organization (PAHO). Cuba receives little assistance in this field from sources other than the United Nations system. However, the International Planned Parenthood Federation (IPPF) contributes about 15 per cent of the national demand for hormonal contraceptives, 30 per cent of IUDs and 15 per cent of condoms. An international NGO, Medecins sans Frontières, is planning to provide condoms. Canada provided almost $400,000 worth of IUDs in 1996. PAHO provides only technical assistance, mainly for research. UNAIDS has announced a contribution of $60,000 for the purchase of condoms for 1997, which will cover 3 per cent of the national requirements of condoms during that year.

Proposed programme

12. The proposed assistance will be provided entirely in the area of reproductive health, including related IEC activities such as the promotion of sex education in the school system. UNFPA will assist the country in integrating a post-ICPD comprehensive reproductive health approach into its primary health care system. This will entail helping Cuba improve the quantity, quality and variety of available contraceptives; institute and reinforce sex education in the formal school system; and improve the quality of reproductive health care, including the provision of better counselling that includes a gender perspective. UNFPA's assistance is particularly aimed at improving the reproductive health conditions for adolescents and youth, with emphasis in the provinces of Guantánamo, Granma, Holguín, Las Tunas and Santiago de Cuba. Efforts will be focused on the first stages of sexual and reproductive life in order to avoid unwanted pregnancies, to delay the first pregnancy and to avoid abortions.

13. By the end of the proposed programme, UNFPA will have provided at least 90 per cent of all instruments and materials needed for vasectomies and for female sterilization, 40 per cent of IUDs and 15 per cent of condoms as well as 7 per cent of the national demand for injectable contraceptives. This will be supported by technical assistance in adopting new technologies as well as in the training

of the human resources needed to ensure appropriate use of these inputs. UNFPA also proposes to provide assistance to increase the capacity of the respective national institutions in order to cover 100 per cent of adolescents with proper sex education in the province of Holguín (as a reference centre for all eastern provinces) and at least 20 per cent of the adolescents in the other selected provinces. This will be supported by providing technical assistance for the training of family doctors, nurses and community agents and that of future teachers in order to improve their competence in providing sex education with a gender perspective to Cuba's young people. A strategy will be developed to help provide reproductive health information to the Cuban people through the mass media.

14. The programme will also contribute to improving the counselling techniques of reproductive health providers, including the incorporation of a gender perspective in their counselling, by training 60 per cent of all reproductive health providers in the country. The programme will enhance the professional skills of those service providers by encouraging the use of appropriate training methods, by making available an adequate number of training materials and by helping to improve the dissemination of information within the health care system.

Implementation, monitoring, evaluation and coordination

15. In order to ensure tailoring the proposed assistance to the specific conditions and needs of each province, coordination will be strengthened with the local administrations, academic institutions and the health and education authorities in each province. A total of 60 per cent of the proposed resources will be allocated to the five priority provinces. The remaining 40 per cent will be assigned to the rest of the provinces. The Ministry for Foreign Investment and Economic Collaboration is responsible for supervising and coordinating external assistance at the central level. UNFPA's assistance will be executed by the Government through multiple partnerships at the local level. To that effect, the most appropriate agencies in each case will be chosen from public institutions, mass and community organizations and academic groups.

16. The proposed activities will receive technical advisory services from the Country Support Team for the Latin American and Caribbean region. Implementation will be monitored through periodic field visits and through regular tripartite reviews. Cuba has well-established institutional information systems, and these will be able to monitor changes in reproductive health indicators during the cycle of assistance to see how well the programme is able to help the country maintain its current standards. A mid-term review will be carried out in mid-1999.

Recommendation

17. The Executive Director recommends that the Executive Board approve the proposed assistance to Cuba, as outlined above, in the amount of $4.5 million from UNFPA's regular resources, to the extent such resources are available and consistent with Executive Board decision 96/15 on the allocation of UNFPA resources.